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# **The Two-Sided Role of Inclusive Victimhood for Intergroup Reconciliation: Evidence from Northern Ireland**

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# **The Two-Sided Role of Inclusive Victimhood for Intergroup Reconciliation: Evidence from Northern Ireland**

### **Abstract**

Inclusive victim beliefs (i.e., perceived similarity with other victim groups worldwide) can have positive effects on intergroup relations. However, there may be limitations to these seemingly constructive construals. We investigated in the Northern Irish context whether inclusive victimhood might sometimes also act as an obstacle to intergroup reconciliation. In Study 1, we found that inclusive victimhood can go along with either high or low competitive victimhood and, in turn, with lesser versus greater willingness for reconciliation, respectively. In Study 2, we asked participants which groups they thought about when responding to inclusive victimhood items, coding whether answers suggested a universal or a selective inclusivity. This type of inclusivity moderated the relationships between inclusive victimhood and readiness for reconciliation: Inclusive victimhood correlated positively with intergroup forgiveness when based on a universal notion of inclusivity, and tended to correlate positively with competitive victimhood when based on a selective notion of inclusivity. These results extend the emerging literature on collective victim beliefs and suggest that expressing shared victimization with other groups may be used strategically to strengthen the ingroup's position in an intergroup conflict, which might act as an obstacle to intergroup reconciliation.

*Keywords:* intergroup conflict, collective victimhood, intergroup reconciliation, forgiveness, Northern Ireland

## **The Two-Sided Role of Inclusive Victimhood for Intergroup Reconciliation: Evidence from Northern Ireland**

Over many years, and particularly during the 30 years of “the Troubles”, many people in Northern Ireland have become victims of violence perpetrated by both sides, leading to diverse appraisals of how to deal with this legacy (Brewer & Hayes, 2014). Even among those who were not personally harmed, a subjective sense of collective victimhood can impede reconciliation (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012). Yet, victimization can also unite members of different groups who perceive their experiences as similar, which can promote positive outgroup attitudes and—when it extends to the other conflict party—reconciliation (Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013; Vollhardt, 2009, 2015). Conversely, inclusive victimhood with victim groups worldwide (third parties, unrelated to the ingroup’s conflict) might backlash, contributing to united opposition to the other conflict party and impairing reconciliation. We aimed to examine whether different types of inclusive victim beliefs with different reference groups differentially predict willingness to reconcile. Specifically, we explored the potentially ambivalent role of inclusive victimhood as a facilitator of or obstacle to reconciliation.

Collective victimhood refers to people’s sense of group-based victimization by virtue of their identification with a victimized group, even without having been personally harmed (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Victimization involves diminished social power, and at least at the individual level, victimhood is often stigmatized (Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983). However, at the collective level the victim status can be used to legitimize outgroup violence. For example, reminding people of historical ingroup victimization reduced their perceived collective guilt for their group’s harmful actions in the present (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Bar-Tal et al. (2009) suggest several other consequences of victimhood that may obstruct reconciliation, including

delegating responsibility for the conflict, feeling morally superior, and dismissing criticism from other groups.

Elaborating on how collective victim beliefs contribute to conflict maintenance and escalation, Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, and Lewis (2008) and Noor, Brown, and Prentice (2008) showed in Northern Ireland and Chile that people often express “competitive victimhood”, believing that the ingroup has suffered more and is the legitimate victim in the conflict. In these studies, competitive victimhood was associated with less trust, desire for forgiveness, and readiness for reconciliation. Similarly, in surveys in Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda, competitive victimhood predicted negative intergroup attitudes and desire to politically exclude outgroups (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014).

This view, however, is one-sided in focusing only on negative consequences of collective victimhood. Vollhardt’s (2009, 2015) analysis is more optimistic and suggests how collective victimhood might also contribute to positive intergroup relations. In contrast to “exclusive victim consciousness”, which encompasses competitive victimhood and other beliefs regarding the ingroup’s unique victimization, “inclusive victim consciousness” entails perceiving similarities between the ingroup’s and other groups’ victimization. This may or may not include the outgroup in a conflict. Thus, one needs to distinguish between conflict-specific inclusive victim consciousness (perceived similarities with the other conflict party) and general inclusive victim consciousness (perceived similarities with victim groups worldwide; Vollhardt, 2015). Inclusive victimhood (of both kinds) can promote more positive intergroup outcomes. For example, the aforementioned surveys in Africa also found that conflict-specific inclusive victimhood predicted supporting political inclusion of outgroups and speaking out on their behalf (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014). Similarly, reminding Jewish Israelis and Palestinians of shared, conflict-related victimhood increased forgiveness (Shnabel et al., 2013). Furthermore, Jewish Americans who

read about other victim groups during the Holocaust showed an increased prosocial orientation toward present-day victim groups (Vollhardt, 2013).

However, the potential of inclusive victimhood to facilitate intergroup reconciliation might be limited. First, portraying similarities without acknowledging differences in the groups' suffering might create distinctiveness threat and a need for acknowledgement, which in turn worsens intergroup attitudes (Vollhardt, 2013). Second, inclusive victimhood rhetoric may also be used strategically to gain legitimacy and elicit solidarity from others—as the examples provided by Yildiz and Verkuyten (2011) of Alevi activists using “inclusive” comparisons (e.g., with other minority groups, the Holocaust) suggest. While such victim beliefs appear inclusive, they are limited to select groups and may entail little outgroup empathy. These dynamics have not yet been studied systematically. The present research attempted to provide a first empirical investigation of potential limitations of inclusive victimhood.

### **The Present Research**

The general aim of the present studies was to investigate the contribution of different victim beliefs to readiness for reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and contribute to the understanding of social psychological processes in this context (for an overview, see Ferguson, Muldoon, & McKeown, 2014). We hypothesized that while competitive victimhood (comparing two conflict parties' suffering) would be negatively related to readiness for reconciliation, inclusive victimhood (assessing whether similarities with other victim groups in general are perceived) may have positive *or* negative relationships with readiness for reconciliation. Readiness for reconciliation can be defined as beliefs supporting social reconstruction, intergroup trust and empathy, and forgiveness. Because there are several different conceptualizations (e.g., Corkalo Biruški & Ajduković, 2009; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), we included these to develop factorially valid measures of different dimensions of readiness for reconciliation.

To control for conceptually related correlates of inclusive and competitive victimhood and test their degree of overlap or distinctiveness, we also measured exclusive victimhood (perceived distinctiveness of the ingroup's suffering) and personal centrality of victimhood (Vollhardt, 2010) as well as "perpetual intergroup victimhood orientation" (PIVO) and "fear of victimizing" (FOV; Klar, Schori-Eyal, & Klar, 2013; Schori, Klar, & Roccas, 2009). PIVO captures not only the belief in the uniqueness of the ingroup's suffering, but also outgroup distrust and perceived continued threat to the ingroup. PIVO impedes reconciliation. Conversely, FOV assesses apprehension that the ingroup may become an aggressor.

### Study 1

In Study 1, the main research question concerned correlations of inclusive and competitive victimhood with other measures of collective victimhood, and their interplay in predicting readiness for reconciliation.

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** A convenience sample of 149 participants (120 female, 29 male) completed the study. Their age ranged from 18 to 55 ( $M = 25.30$ ,  $SD = 8.17$ ). Forty-nine identified as Protestants, 4 as Unionist, 1 as Loyalist, 65 as Catholic, 19 as Nationalist, 5 as Republican, and 6 as "Other".<sup>1</sup> 62% had a Bachelor's degree or higher and 99% had completed 14 years of school.

Participants were recruited by emails sent to three schools' student mailing lists at a university in Northern Ireland and completed an online questionnaire ( $n = 136$ ). Other

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<sup>1</sup> The two main communities can be categorized broadly as Catholic and Protestant (e.g. Goeke-Morey et al., 2014). Protestants tend to be Unionist in their political affiliation and support the Union between Northern Ireland and Britain, while Catholics tend to be Nationalists and believe in the union of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland (Coakley, 2007). The labels "Loyalist" and "Republican" refer to traditionally paramilitary affiliations that are from the Unionist and Nationalist communities respectively (Hayes & McAllister, 2001). While the labels used in this study are not mutually exclusive, they offered participants the ability to distinguish between a primarily religious, political or paramilitary identity. Some of these groups were small and were therefore omitted from analyses of group differences, or combined into their broader community categories.



participants were recruited through personal contacts and completed the same questionnaire in paper form ( $n = 13$ ). After completing the study, participants received a debriefing form including contact details for a Northern Irish victim support group.

Competitive victimhood, PIVO, FOV, inclusive victimhood, exclusive victimhood, personal centrality of victimhood, and intergroup reconciliation orientations were measured as described below, in this order.

**Measures.** Sample items for all measures, their means and reliabilities are reported in Table 1. Conflict-related victim beliefs were assessed with Noor, Brown, and Prentice' (2008) *competitive victimhood* measure, which had been used in Northern Ireland. To assess perceived similarities and distinctiveness with other, unspecified victim groups we used Vollhardt's (2010) measures of *inclusive* and *exclusive victimhood*. To measure the degree to which people perceive the ingroup's victimization as personally important, we used Vollhardt's (2010) measure of *personal centrality of victimhood*. *Perpetual ingroup victimhood orientation (PIVO)* and *fear of victimizing (FOV)* were measured with items adapted from Schori et al. (2009) for the Northern Irish context.

To assess orientations to reconciliation, four measures were used: Noor, Brown, and Prentice's (2008) *intergroup forgiveness* and *reconciliation* scales; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, McLernon, Niens, and Noor's (2004) *intergroup forgiveness and revenge* scale; and an adapted version of Corkalo Biruški and Ajduković's (2009) *social reconstruction* scale.<sup>2</sup>

**Factorial validity.** We followed a two-step procedure to obtain factorially distinct measures. First, the 40 items related to perceived victimhood and the 41 reconciliation items were submitted to separate principal axis factor analyses with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). For the victimhood items, the scree plot suggested a six-factor solution. All but four items loaded

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<sup>2</sup> The complete list of items used in Studies 1 and 2 is available upon request from the first author.

strongly ( $> .40$ ) and uniquely (secondary loadings  $< .30$ ) on “their” factor. For the reconciliation items, after removing cross-loading items and items with low loadings, three factors with at least three clearly loading items resulted.

Next, the remaining 36 victimhood items and 18 reconciliation-related items were factor-analyzed together. Eight factors with at least three clearly loading items were obtained. The six victimhood factors matched the six dimensions of victimhood (inclusive, exclusive, competitive, PIVO, FOV, centrality). A seventh factor comprised nine items from Corkalo Biruški and Ajduković’s (2009) ‘social reconstruction’ scale referring to acceptance of ingroup responsibility, outgroup empathy and trust, and support for cooperation and equality. An eighth factor relating to ‘intergroup forgiveness’ comprised three items from Hewstone et al.’s (2004) measure and two items from Noor, Brown, and Prentice (2008) (see Table 1).

## Results

Correlations between all variables are reported in Table 2. Competitive victimhood correlated moderately positively with personal centrality of victimhood and PIVO, was unrelated to exclusive victimhood and FOV, and correlated moderately negatively with social reconstruction and forgiveness. Inclusive victimhood correlated weakly positively with personal centrality of victimhood and, unexpectedly, with competitive victimhood. Further, it correlated weakly negatively with exclusive victimhood, was unrelated to PIVO, FOV, and social reconstruction and forgiveness. This pattern suggests that inclusive victimhood may not always play a constructive role for intergroup reconciliation. Therefore, we explored whether there are subgroups of participants that differ in the meaning they ascribe to inclusive victimhood.

Specifically, we inspected the scatterplot of inclusive and competitive victimhood to identify subgroups with distinct combinations of these two variables (Figure 1). The scatterplot had a triangular shape, in which the variation in competitive victimhood is higher at higher levels

of inclusive victimhood than at lower levels. Thus, for some participants inclusive victimhood went together with high levels of competitive victimhood, and for others with low levels of competitive victimhood.

Next, we ran a hierarchical cluster analysis based on participants' inclusive and competitive victimhood scores, with cluster memberships saved and optimized using a k-means cluster-center analysis (see Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielmann, 2003). A three-cluster solution resulted in clusters of approximately similar size that were well interpretable (see Figure 1, and cluster means and standard deviations in Table 3; effect sizes of the cluster differences were  $\eta^2 = .63$  for both inclusive and competitive victimhood). Participants in Cluster 1 ( $n = 40$ ) expressed average levels of competitive victimhood and relatively low levels of inclusive victimhood.<sup>3</sup> Clusters 2 ( $n = 50$ ) and 3 ( $n = 59$ ) were of particular interest. In both, participants expressed relatively high levels of inclusive victimhood. However, while participants in Cluster 2 also expressed low levels of competitive victimhood in the context of the Northern Irish conflict, participants in Cluster 3 expressed relatively high levels.

We further investigated the clusters with ANOVAs, using the additional victimhood and reconciliation-related variables as dependent variables (see Table 3). Participants falling into the various clusters differed significantly in all variables except for FOV. Post-hoc tests (LSD) indicated that participants in Cluster 2 (high in inclusive and low in competitive victimhood) expressed lower levels of exclusive victimhood than participants in Cluster 1 (low in inclusive victim beliefs and average in competitive victimhood) ( $p = .01$ ). Compared to participants in both Cluster 1 and Cluster 3 (high in inclusive and high in competitive victimhood), participants in Cluster 2 also indicated greater support for social reconstruction (marginally for Cluster 1,  $p_1 = .08$ ;  $p_3 = .02$ ) and forgiveness ( $p_1 = .03$ ;  $p_3 = .002$ ). Further, participants in Cluster 3 were higher

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<sup>3</sup> "Average" and "relative" refer to the score range within each construct and not to absolute values.

than those in both Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 in personal centrality of victimhood ( $p_1 < .001$ ;  $p_2 = .005$ ) and PIVO ( $p_1 = .02$ ;  $p_2 = .001$ ). There were no other significant differences.

There were also no cluster differences in age,  $F(2, 146) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .82$ , gender,  $\chi^2(2, n = 149) = 0.64$ ,  $p = .73$ , or educational level,  $\chi^2(4, n = 147) = 4.81$ ,  $p = .31$ .<sup>4</sup> However, there was a significant difference in terms of group membership,  $\chi^2(3, n = 133) = 25.86$ ,  $p < .001$ . In Cluster 1 (low in inclusive victimhood), Protestants were over- and Nationalists were underrepresented (standardized residuals [s.res.] = 2.39 and -2.20,  $ps = .017$  and  $.028$ ); and in Cluster 3 (high in both inclusive and competitive victimhood), Nationalists were overrepresented (s.res. = 2.98,  $p = .003$ ). There were no significant standardized residuals involving Catholics.

## Discussion

The analysis revealed that inclusive victimhood was not straightforwardly correlated with reconciliation. Surprisingly, inclusive victimhood was even positively related to competitive victimhood. A closer inspection of this relationship suggests that inclusive victimhood may take on a conflict-enhancing *or* a constructive meaning. Only when combined with low levels of competitive victimhood did inclusive victimhood predict support for social reconstruction and forgiveness. Conversely, when combined with high levels of competitive victimhood, inclusive victimhood did not predict support for reconstruction or forgiveness.

These ambivalent results led us to hypothesize that there are at least two different types of inclusive victim beliefs, which differ in their scope of inclusivity. One type may represent a *universal* inclusivity that does not distinguish between different experiences of victimization and focuses on human suffering caused by violent conflict, regardless of its reasons. This form of inclusive victimhood may be associated with empathy for the adversarial group and with a

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<sup>4</sup> For statistical reasons, in both studies categories with less than five participants were omitted from  $\chi^2$  analyses.

stronger prosocial orientation, thereby playing a constructive role in intergroup conflict (Shnabel et al., 2013; Vollhardt, 2009; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014). The other type may represent a *selective* inclusivity whereby other victim groups are only included conditionally, depending on their similarity in terms of the conflict position and resulting, specific experiences of victimization (e.g., victims of terrorism; victims of occupation). This type of inclusive victimhood may be primarily motivated by a desire for acknowledgement of the ingroup's suffering, and for furthering its cause and legitimacy in order to obtain support (see Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Vollhardt, 2015). Selective inclusive victimhood may play a detrimental role for reconciliation and contribute to the conflict by reinforcing the ingroup's conflict position and contributing to hostility, perceived injustice, and desire for revenge.

## Study 2

The aim of Study 2 was to examine the two hypothesized types of inclusive victimhood and their implications for reconciliation more directly. We measured inclusive victimhood and competitive victimhood (and exclusive victimhood and personal centrality of victimhood as additional correlates), as well as intergroup empathy and forgiveness as aspects of readiness for reconciliation. Most centrally, we included two open-ended questions asking which victim groups participants had in mind (and why) when responding to the inclusive victimhood items. These questions were designed to assess (without prompting a particular response) the two hypothesized types of inclusive victimhood: universal and selective. We expected that *universal* inclusive victimhood would be associated with reduced competitive victimhood and increased readiness for reconciliation, whereas *selective* inclusive victimhood would be associated with increased competitive victimhood and reduced readiness for reconciliation.

## Method

**Participants and design.** A convenience sample of 107 participants (61 female, 46 male) was recruited through personal contacts and snowball sampling, aiming to reach a more general population than in Study 1. Participants completed the questionnaire either online ( $n = 50$ ) or in paper form ( $n = 57$ ). Their age ranged from 18 to 74 ( $M = 35.96$ ,  $SD = 15.88$ ). Forty-five identified as Protestants, 6 as Unionist, 35 as Catholic, 7 as Nationalist, 3 as Republican, and 11 as “Other”. Educational levels were varied; 16% held a postgraduate degree, 34% a Bachelor’s degree, 13% HND/NVQ (two years of undergraduate studies), 21% had 14 years of school, 14% 12 years of school, and 3% no degree. The same victim support group information as in Study 1 was provided in the debriefing form.

Personal centrality of victimhood, inclusive victimhood, universal versus selective inclusivity, exclusive victimhood, competitive victimhood, forgiveness, and empathy were measured as described below, in this order. For some measures we added items to those used in Study 1 to improve psychometric qualities; for other measures we used shorter, conceptually similar scales.

**Materials.** *Personal centrality of victimhood* was assessed with the three items from Study 1, plus two additional items from Vollhardt (2010). *Inclusive victimhood* was measured using two items from Study 1 (slightly modified), plus three additional items from Vollhardt (2010). *Exclusive victimhood* was measured with three items from Study 1 (slightly modified), plus one additional item from Vollhardt (2010). *Competitive victimhood* was measured with the same items we used in Study 1.

*Intergroup forgiveness* was assessed using six items from Noor, Brown, and Prentice (2008). *Intergroup empathy*, in its cognitive and affective aspects, was measured with six items from Noor, Brown, et al. (2008). A sample item was: “When I hear a piece of news regarding a

sectarian attack against members of the other community, I try to look at it from their point of view”.

*Universal versus selective inclusive victimhood* was assessed with two open-ended questions directly following the inclusive victimhood items: “Which groups in the world do you think have suffered in similar ways to your community?” and “Why do you think these groups have suffered in similar ways to your group?” Participants’ answers to both questions combined were coded independently by one of the authors and a student assistant into three categories: universal (coded +1), selective (coded -1), and missing/unclear (coded 0). Responses were coded based on which cause of their group’s suffering participants’ answers suggested. A response was coded as *universal* when it referred to a non-partisan, universal cause of suffering that affects both sides in a conflict (e.g., prejudice, religious differences), and/or mentioned specific groups with different positions in a conflict (different from the participant’s ingroup or from each other), and/or focused on similarity of suffering without mentioning any cause or conflict position. A response was coded as *selective* when it referred to a partisan cause of suffering that typically targets one side (e.g., oppression, terrorism), and/or mentioned groups that could be clearly identified as having conflict positions similar to the ingroup’s position. A third category (missing/unclear) was coded when there was no response or when insufficient detail prohibited interpreting the responses. The inter-coder reliability was sufficient (Cohen’s kappa = .79). Inconsistencies between the coders were resolved through discussion. The codes were then checked independently by the other authors, again with inconsistencies discussed (see examples for each category in Table 4).

**Factorial validity.** The 32 items were factor-analyzed (principal axis method, direct oblimin rotation). The scree plot suggested a six-factor solution. All but four items loaded

strongly ( $> .40$ ) and uniquely (secondary loadings  $< .30$ ) on one factor (see reliabilities and descriptive statistics in Table 5).

## Results

Correlations are presented in Table 6. Similar to Study 1, inclusive victimhood correlated moderately positively with personal centrality of victimhood and moderately negatively with exclusive victimhood, and was unrelated to intergroup forgiveness and empathy. Inclusive victimhood was unrelated to competitive victimhood, different from Study 1 (where it was positively correlated). Similar to Study 1, competitive victimhood correlated moderately positively with personal centrality of victimhood and moderately negatively with intergroup forgiveness and empathy; it correlated moderately positively with exclusive victimhood, different from Study 1 (where it was unrelated).

ANOVAs showed that inclusive victimhood differed depending on the type of inclusivity,  $F(2, 104) = 9.42, p < .001$  ( $\text{Eta}^2 = .15$ ), as did competitive victimhood,  $F(2, 104) = 6.11, p = .003$  ( $\text{Eta}^2 = .11$ ). Inclusive victimhood was higher for those coded as selective ( $M = 4.15, SD = 0.59$ ) or as universal ( $M = 3.94, SD = 0.57$ ) than for those coded as unclear/missing ( $M = 3.60, SD = 0.54$ ),  $p_{\text{selective}} < .001, p_{\text{universal}} = .02$  (post-hoc LSD tests). Inclusive victimhood did not differ significantly between those coded as selectively inclusive and those coded as universal,  $p = .14$ . Competitive victimhood was higher for those coded as expressing selective inclusive victimhood ( $M = 2.94, SD = 0.88$ ) than for those coded as expressing universal inclusive victimhood ( $M = 2.27, SD = 0.75$ ),  $p < .001$ , and those whose responses were unclear/missing ( $M = 2.53, SD = 0.7$ ),  $p = .02$ ; the latter two did not differ significantly,  $p = .19$ . These different combinations of inclusive and competitive victimhood were similar to the three cluster profiles in Study 1.

The type of inclusive victimhood was unrelated to participants' age,  $F(2, 104) = 0.14, p = .87$ , and educational level,  $\text{Chi}^2(8, N = 104) = 7.73, p = .46$ . It was marginally related to gender,



$\chi^2(2) = 5.54, p = .06$ ; among those who expressed selective inclusive victimhood, men tended to be overrepresented (s.res. = 1.40,  $p = .16$ ) and women underrepresented (s.res. = -1.22,  $p = .22$ ). Again, the type of inclusive victimhood was significantly related to community membership,  $\chi^2(2, N = 96) = 10.43, p = .005$ : among those who expressed selective inclusive victimhood, Protestants/Unionists tended to be underrepresented (s.res. = -1.76,  $p = .08$ ) and Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans overrepresented (s.res. = 1.87,  $p = .06$ ).

To examine our core hypothesis that the relationships between inclusive victimhood and the other variables depend on the type of inclusivity, we used moderated regression analyses. Type of inclusivity was coded with two contrast variables: the focal contrast (selective -1, missing/unclear 0, universal +1) and an orthogonal contrast (selective +0.5, missing/unclear -1, universal +0.5). Interaction terms were created after  $z$ -standardizing inclusive victimhood.

The relationships between inclusive victimhood and competitive victimhood as well as intergroup forgiveness were moderated by the type of inclusivity (see Table 7).<sup>5</sup> Simple slopes further examining these interaction effects are presented in Figures 2a-b. There was a non-significant tendency for inclusive victimhood to be positively related to competitive victimhood when it was based on a selective notion of inclusiveness ( $B = -0.25, SE = 0.20, p = .12$ ), but negatively when it was based on a universal notion ( $B = 0.21, SE = 0.15, p = .12$ ). Inclusive victimhood was positively related to intergroup forgiveness only when it took on a universal notion ( $B = 0.37, SE = 0.17, p = .01$ ). Furthermore, inclusive victimhood was negatively related to exclusive victimhood (not moderated by type of inclusivity), and unrelated to intergroup empathy.

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<sup>5</sup> For intergroup forgiveness, two cases with studentized deleted residuals  $> 3.5$  were excluded as outliers. Without exclusion of these two cases, the average effect of inclusive victimhood ( $B = 0.12, SE = 0.08, p = .13$ ) and the interaction effect of inclusive victimhood and the focal contrast ( $B = 0.21, SE = 0.10, p = .04$ ) were smaller.

We also conducted robustness checks, investigating whether these effects remained significant when community membership was considered. When (broad) community membership (focal contrast: Protestant/Unionist -1, Catholic/Nationalist/Republican +1, Other 0; orthogonal contrast: Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican 0.5, Other -1) in addition to type of inclusivity was included as a predictor and moderator of the effects of inclusive victimhood, their interaction effects on competitive victimhood became non-significant,  $ps > .14$ . The interaction effect with type of inclusivity on intergroup forgiveness remained significant,  $B = 0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .03$ .

## Discussion

Study 2 conceptually replicated Study 1's finding that inclusive victimhood is not always correlated with support for intergroup reconciliation. Although inclusive victimhood was related to lesser exclusive victimhood, it was unrelated to intergroup empathy and forgiveness. Answers to questions about groups participants thought had suffered in similar ways to the ingroup shed more light on these relations. Inclusive victimhood was positively related to forgiveness only when it took on a universal notion, that is, when it referred to similarity to other groups worldwide who suffered because of general causes of conflict, or because of *other* causes than one's own community. In contrast, inclusive victimhood was positively related to competitive victimhood when it was selective, referring to similarity to other groups worldwide that suffered because of the *same* specific causes as one's own community.

Although universal inclusivity was somewhat more common among Protestant (and Unionist) participants and selective inclusivity among Catholic (and Nationalist and Republican) participants, this did not affect the links between universal inclusive victimhood and forgiveness. Only the link between selective inclusive victimhood and competitive victimhood seemed to be

partly due to increased selective inclusive victimhood among Catholic, Nationalist, and Republican participants.

These associations were found even though many participants did not answer the open-ended questions or provide sufficient detail to code them as selective or universal, which reduced the statistical power to detect interaction effects. However, using open-ended questions to assess universal and selective inclusive victimhood had the advantage of reducing demand characteristics and not prompting certain responses by asking about specific groups.

### **General Discussion**

Two studies using different methodological approaches suggested that inclusive victimhood is not always associated with constructive intergroup outcomes and reconciliation. Indeed, it can also relate to competitive victimhood and act as an obstacle to peace. At least two forms of inclusive victimhood need to be distinguished: universal and selective. Constructive effects of inclusive victimhood depend on it being universal. If inclusivity is defined selectively, likely based on a “partisan” notion of conflict, inclusive victimhood may aggravate conflict while also creating solidarity with other selected groups.

Obtaining evidence for the two-sided role of inclusive victimhood was possible because inclusive victimhood was measured more generally, allowing participants to think of groups outside of the ingroup’s conflict. This differs from “common victimhood” (Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel et al., 2013), a form of inclusive victimhood referring to the other conflict party. In Study 2, only few open-ended responses mentioned the other conflict party. Thus, it is important to measure both general and conflict-specific forms of victimhood (Vollhardt, 2015; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2014). Conflict-specific forms of inclusive victimhood are presumably much rarer and psychologically more challenging than general notions of (selective) inclusive victimhood.

Methodologically, although it does not make full use of the information contained in continuous variables, the cluster analysis used in Study 1 allows studying different combinations of relationships—rather than merely linear relationships. This can shed light on the underlying motives for expressing different beliefs in different subgroups (see also Cohrs et al., 2003). But since it is an exploratory technique, it was important to cross-validate the results using a different approach in Study 2.

Our research has several limitations. First, because both studies were correlational, causal directions could not be tested. Therefore, we cannot rule out that reconciliation influenced victim beliefs, or that third variables confounded the relationships. Also, we assessed dimensions of collective victimhood with available and partially overlapping measures. The factor analysis of these conceptually related measures is a contribution of our study. However, the relationships between these constructs need to be further examined, in particular how conflict-related victim beliefs relate to victim beliefs concerning other conflicts worldwide. Furthermore, despite the strengths of open-ended measures of selective and universal inclusive victimhood, quantitative measures asking about specific groups (e.g., with the same or different conflict positions) would provide more statistical power to test these effects. Complementarily, more in-depth qualitative research would add to our understanding of the complexities of people's subjective sense of victimhood in particular conflict contexts. A final limitation concerns our relatively small and well-educated convenience samples (although the sample in Study 2 was more diverse). Knowledge about world history likely influences victim beliefs. Therefore, replicating these studies with larger and more diverse community samples, and in other post-conflict contexts, is crucial.

Our findings suggest important questions for further research on the distinction between universal and selective inclusivity, and on the processes underlying constructive versus

destructive consequences of victim beliefs. We suggest that this difference may depend on individuals' subjective understandings of the conflict and the groups' conflict positions. Research in other contexts shows that people hold different representations of conflict (e.g., Stahel & Cohrs, 2015) that include beliefs about conflict causes, dynamics, barriers and approaches to conflict resolution and emotions towards the conflict parties. Such holistic conflict representations may influence which groups are included in individuals' sense of collective victimhood. Further research could investigate these propositions, and examine the underlying processes. For example, including other groups selectively into one's sense of victimhood may reduce willingness for reconciliation because knowing that the ingroup's specific victimization experiences are more widespread could increase perceived injustice and anger. Likewise, unity with other victim groups could increase perceived efficacy to tackle the other conflict party.

The relation between community membership and type of inclusivity, with universal inclusive victimhood being expressed more often by (high-status) Protestants (and Unionists) and selective inclusive victimhood by Catholics and Nationalists, suggests that these differences may be related to the groups' power differences: High-power groups may interpret a conflict more universally and desire symmetrical conflict resolution strategies (e.g., harmony-oriented intergroup encounters), whereas low-power groups may perceive asymmetries in the conflict and desire asymmetrical conflict resolution strategies (e.g., confrontation) (see Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2010).

Social identity content may also play a role in appraising the conflict (Livingstone & Haslam, 2008). The overrepresentation of Nationalists (rather than Catholics) in the high inclusive-victimhood, high competitive-victimhood cluster in Study 1 may represent a more politicized section of the Catholic community that feels more strongly about the conflict. In general, the link between Catholic identity and Nationalist ideology has been weaker than the link

between Protestant identity and Unionist ideology (Coakley, 2007). Lower numbers of self-identified Nationalists and Unionists did not allow for this to be tested in Study 2. Further understanding of how participants understand these identities will allow examining the precise relationship between identity and different victim beliefs.

A better understanding of these processes has promising implications for conflict resolution. Given how psychologically challenging it is to create a sense of common victimhood that includes the other conflict party (Noor et al., 2012), research along the lines sketched above may inspire indirect conflict resolution strategies: Perceived similarities with other, unrelated victim groups may eventually “spill over” to attitudes towards the other conflict party (see Salomon, 2006). There is great potential in research examining strategies through which negative consequences of inclusive victimhood can be avoided and its positive consequences harnessed.

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Table 1

*Sample Items, Cronbach's Alphas and Descriptive Statistics for the Measures Used in Study 1 (N = 149)*

| Scale  | Number of items | Reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha$ ) | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|-----------------|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Competitive Victimhood</b><br>e.g., "On average, throughout 'The Troubles', more harm has been done to my community than to the other community." | 5               | .88                                | 2.73     | 1.11      |
| <b>Inclusive Victimhood</b><br>e.g., "Many other groups in the world have suffered in similar ways to my group."                                     | 3               | .83                                | 4.11     | 0.91      |
| <b>Exclusive Victimhood</b><br>e.g., "No other group has suffered the same way my group has."  | 3               | .72                                | 1.92     | 0.91      |
| <b>Personal Centrality of Victimhood</b><br>e.g., "I am not very interested in learning about what my group experienced in the past." (r)            | 3               | .86                                | 3.67     | 1.20      |
| <b>Perpetual Intergroup Victimhood Orientation</b><br>e.g., "All our enemies throughout history share this in common – they want to get rid of us."  | 10              | .89                                | 2.28     | 0.87      |
| <b>Fear of Victimizing</b><br>e.g., "We are in danger of treating the other community in the same way that we were treated by our worst enemies."    | 12              | .92                                | 2.53     | 0.96      |
| <b>Social Reconstruction</b><br>e.g., "I also sympathise with those on the other side who have lost someone."  | 9               | .89                                | 4.68     | 0.52      |
| <b>Intergroup Forgiveness</b><br>e.g., "I would encourage my community not to have ill thoughts about the other community's motives."                | 5               | .78                                | 4.20     | 0.78      |

*Note.* Response scales ranged from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*). Sample items are below each construct.

Table 2

*Correlations between Variables Used in Study 1 (N = 149)*

|   | 1 | 2    | 3     | 4     | 5      | 6      | 7       | 8       |
|---|---|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1. Competitive<br>Victimhood                      | - | .19* | .14   | .25** | .40*** | .02    | -.26**  | -.29*** |
| 2. Inclusive Victimhood                           |   | -    | -.19* | .19*  | .12    | .07    | .12     | .06     |
| 3. Exclusive Victimhood                           |   |      | -     | .03   | .31*** | .28*** | -.30*** | -.31*** |
| 4. Personal Centrality of<br>Victimhood           |   |      |       | -     | .28**  | .02    | -.14    | -.24**  |
| 5. Perpetual Intergroup<br>Victimhood Orientation |   |      |       |       | -      | .32*** | -.45*** | -.39*** |
| 6. Fear of Victimization                          |   |      |       |       |        | -      | .00     | .03     |
| 7. Social Reconstruction                          |   |      |       |       |        |        | -       | .47***  |
| 8. Intergroup<br>Forgiveness                      |   |      |       |       |        |        |         | -       |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

Table 3

*Characteristics of the Inclusive/Competitive Victimhood Clusters (M, SD) in Study 1 (N = 149)*

|  | <b>Cluster 1 (low<br/>in inclusive,<br/>average in<br/>competitive<br/>victimhood)</b> | <b>Cluster 2 (high<br/>in inclusive,<br/>low in<br/>competitive<br/>victimhood)</b> | <b>Cluster 3 (high<br/>in inclusive,<br/>high in<br/>competitive<br/>victimhood)</b> | <b>F(2, 146)</b>    | <b>Eta<sup>2</sup></b> |
|--|--|---|--|---------------------|------------------------|
| Exclusive Victimhood                           | 2.22 <sup>a</sup> (0.98)   | 1.69 <sup>b</sup> (0.93)  | 1.92 <sup>ab</sup> (0.81)  | 3.88 ( $p = .02$ )  | .05                    |
| Personal Centrality of<br>Victimhood           | 3.23 <sup>a</sup> (1.15)   | 3.49 <sup>a</sup> (1.27)  | 4.11 <sup>b</sup> (1.02)   | 7.97 ( $p = .001$ ) | .10                    |
| Perpetual Intergroup<br>Victimhood Orientation | 2.17 <sup>a</sup> (0.75)   | 2.02 <sup>a</sup> (0.82)  | 2.58 <sup>b</sup> (0.91)   | 6.58 ( $p = .002$ ) | .08                    |
| Fear of Victimizing                            | 2.49 <sup>a</sup> (0.93)   | 2.56 <sup>a</sup> (0.98)  | 2.55 <sup>a</sup> (0.99)   | 0.06 ( $p = .95$ )  | .001                   |
| Social Reconstruction                          | 4.63 <sup>ab</sup> (0.52)  | 4.83 <sup>a</sup> (0.37)  | 4.59 <sup>b</sup> (0.61)   | 3.24 ( $p = .04$ )  | .04                    |
| Intergroup Forgiveness                         | 4.13 <sup>a</sup> (0.78)   | 4.47 <sup>b</sup> (0.66)  | 4.02 <sup>a</sup> (0.83)   | 5.07 ( $p = .01$ )  | .06                    |

*Note.* F values refer to Analyses of Variance of cluster means. Different superscripts within rows indicate significant differences between the cluster means (LSD post-hoc tests;  $p < .05$ , two-tailed).

Table 4

*Examples of Responses Coded for the Different Categories of Inclusivity (Study 2)*

| <b>Universal Inclusivity (<i>n</i> = 29)</b>   | <b>Missing/Unclear (<i>n</i> = 40)</b>   | <b>Selective Inclusivity (<i>n</i> = 38)</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| Any group that has suffered as a result of violent conflict ... The trauma of violent conflict is the same for everyone [Protestant participant]   | Don't know enough about violence in the world but I believe they have suffered for many different reasons [Protestant participant]   | South African, Spanish, Iraq communities ... They have been terrorised by anti-government political groups [Protestant participant]   |
| Any country with civil war ... All have suffered murder, division, hate crimes, years of resentment by extremists on either side [Unionist participant]  | Any in the world driven by ethnic/religious/contested space scenarios, e.g. Balkans, Middle East ... Similar though not identical dynamics in the respective contexts [Protestant participant] | Israelis ... Because they try to accommodate others but get attacked for doing so. It's the old 'give an inch and they'll take a mile' scenario [Protestant participant]                  |
| Other opposing religious groups ... Differences in faith and social views [Catholic participant]   | Anyone whose human rights have been violated ["Other" participant]   | Jews ... Persecution due to religious beliefs and social grouping [Catholic participant]  |
| Both sides of any conflict or wars that are going on. I believe each side has its own stories to be told ... Because of what we are taught when growing up and the area you brought up in [Catholic participant] | ETA, Jewish, people of different races ... Politics [Catholic participant]   | Aborigines, Indian people, Black South Africans, American Indians, Palestinians ... They have had their native countries taken and been murdered and persecuted [Nationalist participant] |

*Note.* The Missing/Unclear cases consisted of 30 cases without an answer, 3 cases where any similarity to other groups' suffering was explicitly denied, and 7 cases that could not be interpreted as universal or selective.

Table 5

*Cronbach's Alphas and Descriptive Statistics for the Victimhood and Reconciliation Scales**(Study 2, N = 107)*

| Scale                             | Number of<br>items | Reliability<br>(Cronbach's $\alpha$ ) | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Competitive Victimhood            | 5                  | .88                                   | 2.60     | 0.83      |
| Inclusive Victimhood              | 5                  | .85                                   | 3.88     | 0.61      |
| Exclusive Victimhood              | 4                  | .78                                   | 2.02     | 0.75      |
| Personal Centrality of Victimhood | 6                  | .85                                   | 2.90     | 0.85      |
| Intergroup Forgiveness            | 4                  | .78                                   | 4.24     | 0.77      |
| Intergroup Empathy                | 4                  | .77                                   | 3.92     | 0.64      |

*Note.* Response scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Table 6

*Correlations between Variables Used in Study 2 (N = 107)*

|                                      | 1 | 2   | 3       | 4      | 5       | 6      |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| 1. Competitive Victimhood            | - | .03 | .23*    | .33*** | -.38*** | -.31** |
| 2. Inclusive Victimhood              |   | -   | -.41*** | .34*** | .10     | .10    |
| 3. Exclusive Victimhood              |   |     | -       | -.03   | -.06    | -.10   |
| 4. Personal Centrality of Victimhood |   |     |         | -      | -.16    | -.10   |
| 5. Intergroup Forgiveness            |   |     |         |        | -       | .30**  |
| 6. Intergroup Empathy                |   |     |         |        |         | -      |

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)



Table 7

*Moderated Regression Analyses Investigating the Role of Inclusive Victimhood Depending on the Type of Inclusivity (Study 2, N = 109)*

| Predictor                      | Competitive<br>Victimhood | Personal<br>Centrality of<br>Victimhood | Exclusive<br>Victimhood | Intergroup<br>Forgiveness | Intergroup<br>Empathy |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Constant                       | 2.53                      | 2.83                                    | 2.03                    | 4.31                      | 3.91                  |
| Inclusive<br>Victimhood (IC)   | -0.06 (0.08)              | 0.18* (0.08)                            | -0.33** (.07)           | 0.14 <sup>+</sup> (0.07)  | 0.05 (0.07)           |
| Focal Contrast<br>(FC)         | -0.28** (0.10)            | -0.14 (0.10)                            | 0.04 (0.09)             | 0.04 (0.08)               | 0.13 (0.08)           |
| Orthogonal<br>Contrast (OC)    | 0.07 (0.12)               | 0.24* (0.11)                            | 0.12 (0.10)             | -0.02 (0.10)              | 0.13 (0.09)           |
| IC × FC                        | -0.23* (0.10)             | -0.23* (0.10)                           | 0.04 (0.09)             | 0.22* (0.09)              | -0.01 (0.08)          |
| IC × OC                        | 0.08 (0.12)               | 0.17 (0.11)                             | 0.01 (0.10)             | 0.03 (0.10)               | 0.11 (0.10)           |
| $\Delta R^2$<br>(Interactions) | .05 <sup>+</sup>          | .06*                                    | .00                     | .06*                      | .01                   |
| $R^2$                          | .15**                     | .25**                                   | .18**                   | .09                       | .06                   |

*Notes.* Unstandardized regression coefficients and SEs (in brackets) are reported. IC was z-standardised; FC: selective -1, missing/unclear 0, universal +1; OC: selective +0.5, missing/unclear -1, universal +0.5.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .07$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

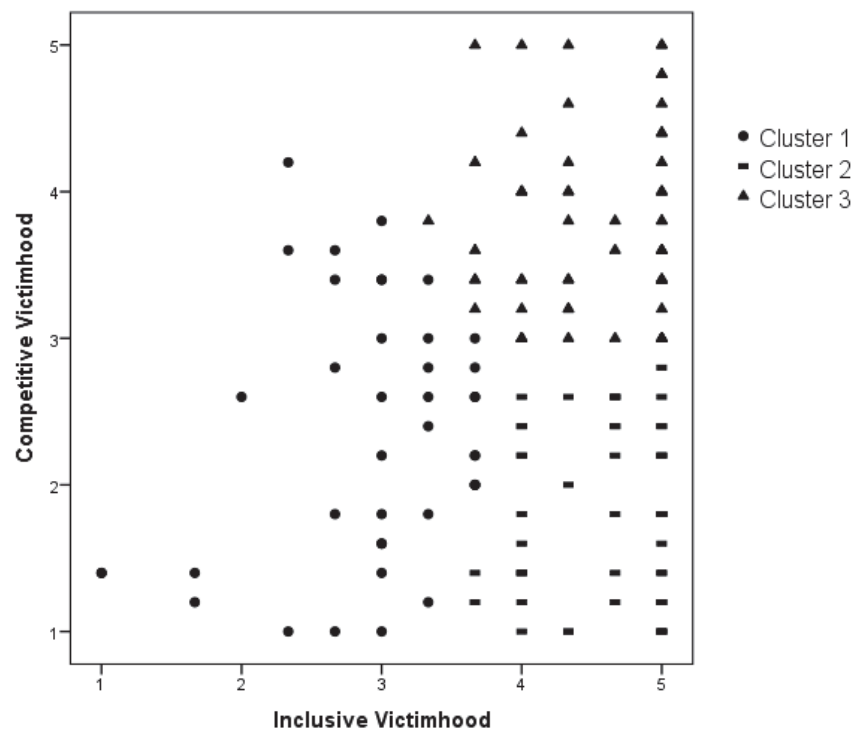
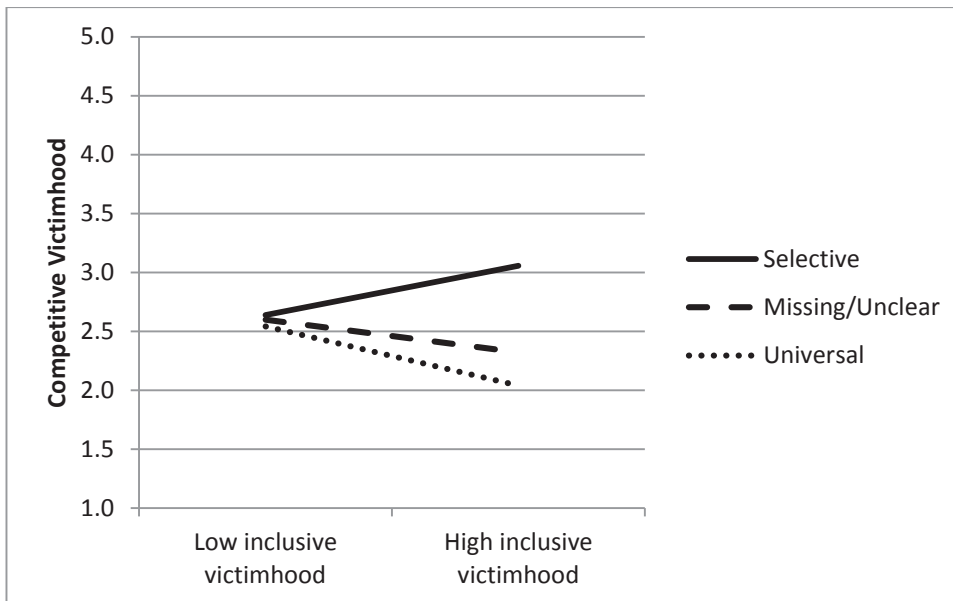


Figure 1. Scatterplot of inclusive and competitive victimhood and cluster membership (Study 1,  $N = 149$ ).

## a) Predicting Competitive Victimhood



## b) Predicting Intergroup Forgiveness

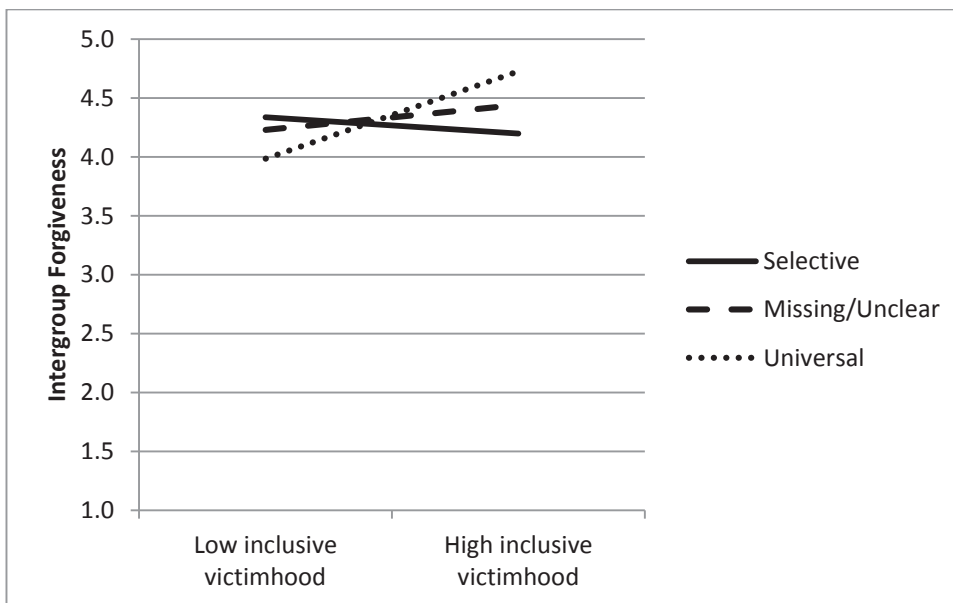


Figure 2a-b. Interaction effects between inclusive victimhood and type of inclusivity (Study 2,  $N = 109$ ).